

March 25, 2011

Dear Senator Harp,

My name is Catherine LeClerc and I am a sophomore in the Nonnewaug, Ellis Clark agriscience program in Woodbury Connecticut. I live in Oakville and I attend this regional agriscience school choice program because I wish to be a horticultural therapist. As I was growing up I watched beloved family members struggle with both mental and physical disabilities. One source of joy that was brought to their lives was when they were introduced to a horticultural therapist. With the help of the therapist their outlook on life and personality drastically improved. From a young age I wanted to be able to help people the same way my loved ones were, using my love of flowers.

I sought out a program that would help me achieve my dream and found that program in the school choice program of Nonnewaug's floriculture class. Had I attended my towns high school I would not have been able to explore the career I wanted the way I can while attending Nonnewaug.

Nonnewaug's SAE program is also a great asset to have participated in that helps to ready students for their careers and gives them hands on time to practice the skills they learned while in the classroom; an SAE is a supervised agricultural experience, like a work study program. My SAE's were at Evergreen Berry Farm in Watertown and at Animals for Life a non profit animal shelter in Middlebury. At Animals for Life I helped exercise and train the dogs and instructed the potential owners about how to care for the animals. By participating in an SAE it encourages the students to get out in the working world and make valuable connections with other, more experienced, workers. Also, students are improving their community by volunteering at non profit organizations, something that probably would not have occurred to them had they not been in this exceptional program.

Within Nonnewaug's agricultural program there are countless activities that can help a student identify their likes and dislikes and therefore lead to help in your searching for a career. I am currently a member of one of the many teams that are offered here at Nonnewaug Agriscience. I am on the Parliamentary Procedure team, we compete against other schools and it helps to develop our public speaking skills and the ability to adapt and think on our feet. These are valuable skills that will give us the advantage when we attend college and enter the highly competitive working world.

However you do not need to participate in career developing events to gain a wide variety of experiences. Only a few days ago I was asked by one of the Ag teachers to assist them in debuting baby goats, and a few months ago I helped deliver piglets. I have participated in countless activities that a "normal" high school student would not be able to do. I can check the oil levels on an engine and know how to correctly handle both large and small animals among countless other life skills.